

"Dont" and "de qui" relatives in written French

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LingLunch du jeudi 9 mai 2019

Dont has been claimed to be an exception to the “subject island” constraint (Tellier, 1991 ; Sportiche, 1981 ; Heck, 2009) and to contrast with true relative pronouns such as de qui. But empirical data are missing. Is extraction out of the subject really allowed with dont and not with de qui ? We provide corpus data from a literary corpus (Frantext) to see the current use of de qui, and to compare it with dont. We also compare subcorpora from the beginning of the 20th century and from the beginning of the 21st century to see if the usage has evolved. Furthermore, we show that de qui interrogatives behave differently than de qui relative clauses and we propose an explanation of this contrast, in line with discourse-based theories of “island” constraints (Erteschick-Shir, 2007 ; Abeillé et al., 2018).